not increase due to fall in demand and general recessionary conditions. During 1994-95 price increased on an average by Rs. 20—25/- per bag of 50 kgs. cement. This was mainly due to increase in the price of inputs, cost of fuel, transportation and overheads. During 1995-96 prices have been stable except during the period December—March which is a period of peak demand for cement. There were also short term rises in prices in a few markets like Bombay due to temporary shortages caused by transportaion bottlenecks, strikes, etc.

(a) and (c) The control on price of cement has been removed with effect from 1st March, 1989. The industry has also been delicensed. Government has been encouraging creation of additional capacity and higher production of cement so that there is a healthy competition in the market and control on price. Government is providing all infrastructure support to the cement industry such as supply of coal and rail wagons on a priority basis.

Extension of Benefit to SC/ST converts to Islam

219. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) the creteria adopted by the Government to consider the request for including the Dalit Christain under the SC/ST category;

(b) the reasons for which Government has come to the conclusion that this benefit should only be extended to SC/ST converts to Buddhists, Sikhs and Christianity;

(c) the reasons for which the SC/ST converts to Islam is excluded and whether such a decision will not amount to discrimination on the basis of caste and ultravires of the Constitution; and

(d) whether Government will consider extending the benefit to SC/ST converts to Islam?

THE MINISTER OF WELFARE (SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA) : (a) to (c) At present, persons belonging to the Scheduled Tribes are recognised as such irrespective of the religion which they profess. However, persons who belong to religions other than Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism can not be deemed to be members of the Scheduled Castes regardless of their caste of origin. The criteria adopted for the specification of Scheduled Castes are extreme social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of the traditional practice of untouchability. The removal of the bar on recognition of Christians of Scheduled Caste origin as Scheduled Castes is under consideration of the Government in the context of claims that they continue to be subject to disabilities arising out of the practice of untouchability even after conversion.

(d) The matter is under examination.

Vocational Training in Tribal Areas

220. SHRI SURESH PACHOURI: Will the Minister of WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether any centrally sponsored scheme is under implementation in the State of Madhya Pradesh for providing vocational training in Tribal Areas of the State;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the general response of the tribals of the State towards the scheme?

THE MINISTER OF WELFARE (SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The scheme of Vocational Training in Tribal areas was introduced in 1992-93 and six Vocational Training Contres have been sanctioned to the State of Madhya Pradesh so far.

(c) The information is being collected from the State Government and will be laid on the Table of the House, on its receipt.